Chapter

Barriers to Interorganizational Learning for Innovation: A Case Study of a Sustainable Tourism Destination

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Abstract

The path to sustainable tourism is marked by challenges and innovation hurdles. This chapter addresses obstacles in learning for innovation faced by tourism actors pursuing certification for sustainability. Sustainability certification signifies environmentally, economically, and socially responsible practices, and can be awarded to businesses, destinations or products. However, challenges such as lack of expertise, high costs, and competition can hinder adoption. Recent research indicates collaboration networks can overcome these barriers, fostering knowledge exchange, learning and innovation. This chapter adopts an organizational learning approach to examine the barriers to learning that a tourism destination experienced when obtaining a sustainability label. The research question is: what barriers to collective learning for sustainable innovation do tourism destinations meet when getting certified? A qualitative case study was conducted on a Norwegian tourism destination with a collective sustainable tourism certification, involving stakeholders and officials. Findings underscore that the sustainability destination label has provided the tourism destination with a context in which learning and innovation for sustainability can take place. Yet, our findings point towards disruptions as well. Three barriers emerged: 1) sustainability goals, 2) user experiences, and 3) knowledge integration. These impede progress towards more sustainable practices, expanded further in the chapter.

Keywords: sustainability, certification, collective learning, barriers to learning, tourism destination

1. Introduction

The road to sustainability in tourism is bumpy and winding, with many innovation puzzles to solve along the way [1]. This chapter discusses the barriers to learning for innovation that tourism actors can face when they get certified in order to become more sustainable [2]. Integrating sustainability into the core activities of organizations and places has gained momentum as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become guides for tourism development.

Before the pandemic, there were increasing concerns regarding tourism, hidden social and environmental costs, and lack of management of the tourism industry. In the One Planet Vision, the UNWTO calls for a responsible recovery of the tourism sector [3]. Tourism actors can either try to continue with business as usual or choose a direction towards sustainability and the implementation of the SDGs. Getting certified can guide tourism destinations in a more sustainable direction and a vast range of certificates, labels and approval schemes have been developed to promote more sustainable tourism practices [1].

Sustainability certification is an indication of the offering of environmentally, economically and socially sound tourism products and practices and can be given out to businesses, destinations or clusters, products, services or management systems [2]. The benefits of these programs are that businesses or destinations become part of an exclusive club of high performers that bring new knowledge, best practices and learning opportunities [4]. However, lack of internal expertise, high start-up or investment costs, a lack of capital resources, competition from other projects, increased price sensitivity and a lack of communication and coordination among organizations have been identified as key obstacles to adopting sustainability certification programs [5].

Recent research shows that collaboration in networks can overcome (some of) these problems by providing the knowledge, support and savings on resources that are needed for getting a sustainability certification. Networks and collaborative arrangements like tourism destinations do not only supply an organization with new knowledge, they also put the organization in a good position to use and exploit the knowledge and transform it into concrete innovations and competitive advantage [6]. Correspondingly, local tourism networks have been conceptualized as learning destinations, inspired by the work of Senge [7] on learning organizations (OL) [8].

Even though the study of collaboration and learning has become a key element for explaining tourism innovation and development, gaps are apparent in organizational learning research in tourism, especially in understanding how interorganizational network practices enable and hamper the learning of tourism organizations [6, 9, 10]. Given that learning is a prerequisite for transformation toward more sustainable practices and innovations, a learning perspective on certification programs in tourism requires considerable attention. OL and tourism literature have been dominated by an optimistic belief that strategies, structures, values and norms for organizational learning can be implemented and will generally lead to positive results for the organization and its members [6, 11]. However, we have evidence from organizational studies that OL activities may be suppressed by political, cultural and structural forces [12]. Yet, understanding how this plays out in the tourism industry in its search for sustainability remains to be developed. While interorganizational learning has been suggested as a solution for addressing knowledge integration and organizational-level learning challenges, it's important to note that collaboration for learning is not without its own difficulties. The following research question is therefore explored: *what barriers to collective learning for sustainable innovation do tourism destinations meet when getting certified?* Hence, the goals of this research are twofold: (a) to discuss collective learning impediments in the tourism destination certification process and (b) to integrate these aspects into a model of the tourism destination learning process. To achieve these goals, a qualitative case study of a Norwegian tourism destination that holds a collective sustainable tourism destination certification was conducted.

2. Literature review

2.1 Destinations

A tourism destination is "a group of actors linked by mutual relationships with specific rules, where the action of each actor influences those of the others so that common objectives must be defined and attained in a coordinated way" ([13], p. 23). Destinations have been conceptualized as formal or informal networks of actors [14] or clusters [15], defined by Porter ([16], p. 197–198) as "geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (e.g., universities, standards agencies, and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also cooperate". In order to understand learning processes in tourism destinations getting a sustainability certification, we, therefore, build on previous studies that address learning in clusters, understand clusters in tourism as learning systems [8, 17–19] as well as studies applying organizational learning theory to understand innovation and development [9].

2.2 Collective learning in tourism destinations

Clusters can be defined based on the classification of specialization, their agglomeration (density of firms in a cluster) and the dimension of their relations. Specialized clusters refer to a connection of the same type of tourism firms (e.g., food-based clusters). Non-specialized clusters are important due to the benefits of complementary differences that attract firms to dissimilar firms, which include also both small and large tourism firms [20].

From a geographic perspective, clusters represent local platforms for resource exchange (knowledge and other resources) and learning opportunities. Theories of industrial districts and innovative milieus argue that integration in networks can facilitate organizational learning and innovation as knowledge and learning come from people and their relationships and experiences with each other [21]. Organizational learning has been defined in different ways but the core of most definitions is that organizational learning is a change in the organization that occurs as the organization acquires experience while performing its tasks [22]. When existing organizational experience is interacting with and reflects upon the context outside the organization, new knowledge is created. In a theoretical framework for analyzing organizational learning, Argote and Miron-Spektor [22] differ between environmental context and organizational context. The environmental context includes elements outside the boundaries of the organization, such as competitors, clients, institutions and regulators. The organizational context includes characteristics of the organization, such as its structure, culture, technology, identity, memory, goals, incentives and strategy ([22], p. 1125). The context also includes relationships with other organizations through alliances, joint ventures and memberships in associations. In tourism destinations, where products and activities such as accommodation, transport, catering and experiences are complementary, complex systems of connections and interrelationships between different types of organizations are formed and make up the context of organizations [23]. The context is considered to have a positive effect on learning as sharing ideas among the participants of the cluster results in a richer understanding and learning of issues, leading to more innovative activities [20].

However, not all organizations experience the same learning and to understand differences in learning outcomes and innovations between organizations, Stam and Spigel [24] go deeper into the qualities of the context and argue that a place's community and culture can have a significant effect on how ideas are shared and on the entrepreneurial abilities of organizations, including learning and innovation.

2.3 Learning for sustainable innovation

Sustainable tourism has ecological, social, economic and cultural dimensions that ensure that development is economically efficient, that resources are managed in such a way that they support future generations, and that essential ecological processes and biological diversity are maintained and are compatible with the culture and values of people affected by it. To realize sustainable tourism development, partners from the tourism industry, government and community need to be drawn into the learning process of tourism planning and development [25]. Schianetz et al. [8], inspired by the learning organization approach of Senge [7], tried to capture the ideas of learning organizations in clusters in a tourism context by presenting a model for a learning tourism destination (LTD) to develop sustainably. They argue that sustainability must be conceived as a transition and learning process [26], and as a "moving" rather than a static goal. In the learning tourism destination model, sustainability, as an idea, technology, and practice, provides a context for actors in the destination. When connecting sustainability labelling to the idea of the learning tourism destination, the label offers the destination an operationalization of the concept of sustainability in the form of guidelines, tasks, and tools. Hence, working with a sustainability program can point noses in the same direction – and create a form of local engagement. The importance of a shared vision for mobilizing is well-known as one of the main learning and innovation enablers in tourism networks [27]. Innovation is therefore increasingly understood as a cumulative and iterative set of activities and coincidences where multiple actors and multiple forms of knowledge interact. According to this view, innovation is fundamentally a social, interrelated, interdependent and collective process [28].

By interacting and collaborating with each other, destination stakeholders exchange knowledge and are exposed to each other's organizational culture and experience. Practice-based studies of learning have addressed boundary objects, brokers and arenas as known enablers for learning [27, 29]. For tourism stakeholders to learn from the certification process, existing knowledge needs to be integrated with new knowledge [28, 30–32]. New knowledge becomes part of the experience of organizations and is translated by individual companies as well as on the collective level of the destination in adaptive management and innovation to ensure resilience to change. Hence, collaborative practices provide learning opportunities for tourism actors, which are a prerequisite for innovation. As the tourism industry often consists of many small businesses, participation in different formal networks, as well as access to knowledge and ideas via boundary spanners and brokers, is important. The ability of organizations to maximize knowledge because of experiencing these learning events will determine how innovative, successful and sustainable they eventually become [33].

2.4 Barriers to interorganizational learning

Inkpen [34] argues that the failure to learn can be caused by undervaluing the knowledge of others, by lacking necessary knowledge connections, by the nature

of knowledge itself that makes learning difficult (explicit knowledge is easier to be acquired than tacit knowledge) or by the organizational culture that is not supporting learning. These factors can be characteristics of individuals, groups or organizations and as such become action-personal, structural-organizational or societal-environmental barriers to learning [12]. Action-personal barriers are characterized by individual thinking, attitudes and behavior for example the lack of decision-making power of an actor or their lack of complementing perspectives [35, 36] that prevent new knowledge to stick to existing knowledge. Structural-organizational barriers can be found on the organizational level and are rooted in organizational strategy, technology, culture and formal regulations for example the lack of access to information and knowledge [37]. Finally, Societal-environmental barriers are found on the interorganizational level and examples are lack of cooperation or a high level of conflicts and competition among stakeholders. Barriers to learning are connected to the way knowledge is absorbed and shared between individuals and organizations; when little or no knowledge is shared, there is a barrier to learning on one or more levels [28]. At the level of the destination, knowledge sticks to a multitude of individuals, groups and organizations like service, hospitality and experience providers, public organizations and the DMO. For tourism actors to learn from the certification process, existing knowledge needs to be integrated with new knowledge. Knowledge integration has been defined as the process through which specialized knowledge is drawn together and combined to create new knowledge [31, 32]. The role of accumulating and integrating knowledge resources for innovation in tourism has received considerable attention in the literature [28, 30, 38]. Surprisingly, barriers and inhibitors of interorganizational learning and innovation, that stop or delay the flow of knowledge between stakeholders and are standing in the way of innovation processes [39] have not been studied as much in the context of tourism.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This work is situated within an interpretive paradigm. Given the relative lack of theoretical understanding of barriers to learning in sustainability-oriented partnerships in tourism, we applied an explorative and qualitative case-study design to develop a theory as an extension of an existing theoretical framework (the learning tourism destination). This approach allows for a more in-depth understanding of knowledge sharing, learning and innovation. In the following paragraph, we will present the empirical settings and the reasons behind our sampling choices.

We applied the Big-Tent criteria for excellent qualitative research [40] where applicable to the current study. Our research design included parameters for validity, credibility and dependability [41]. Credibility was protected using techniques of engagement and observation by the primary researcher and verification of findings between the authors. Our detailed research plan, which included an audit trail of the transcripts and research process, safeguarded dependability and confirmability. We further enforced confirmability through the use of excerpts from interview transcripts to support the findings and discussion. We coded the material in three phases: categorization of the data (open coding), creation of interconnecting categories (axial coding) and selective coding where both researchers worked together to create the final set of codes and nodes.

3.2 Study setting

Trysil is located in the south-east of Norway, close to the Swedish border in a mountainous and forested area. Trysil is Norway's biggest winter destination and offers two alpine ski-areas; Trysilfjellet and Fageråsen. The destination has about 6000 cabins, several hotels and campings and offers outdoor activities all year round. However, the peak of visitors arrives in winter while the shoulder and summer seasons are much less busy. Recently the destination has invested in a large network of mountain biking trails and climbing facilities to offer summer guests outdoor activities. The destination faces the challenge of having developed as an alpine ski-destination during the last 30 years, with high energy levels, many guests in the winter and a generally high environmental footprint. The motivation to get labeled as a sustainable destination is to reduce the negative impacts of mass tourism and offer a more balanced, all-year-round form of tourism that keeps the local community lively and attractive. The project management of the certification process is in the hands of the destination company. The municipality, a private consultant, and the certification agent (Innovation Norway) are part of the management team while the members of the destination company are project participants in the sustainable destination project.

The sustainable destination label is given out by Innovation Norway (IN), and it takes 2 years to realize the first round of certification. IN provides services such as supervision, materials, education, and a network of destinations that work with the same goal. The certification has operationalized the 17 sustainable development goals from the United Nations into 10 principles with 108 indicators [42].

3.3 Data sources

3.3.1 Interviews

The informants were chosen through strategic sampling with additional snow-ball sampling, with time for unplanned/spontaneous interviews suggested by other respondents. In total 9 face-to-face interviews were conducted in 2017 with informants from businesses, municipalities and DMO. Additionally, we conducted online video-interviews with the national certification organization Innovation Norway, as well as Hanen. The latter offers an eco-certification at the business level. The main criteria for the selection of respondents at the case level were variation in types of tourism firms (nature-, culture and food-based, accommodation and size), local destination management, local governments and others involved in the certification process. The conducted interviews varied between 30 minutes and 2 hours in length. They were transcribed verbatim. **Table 1** shows the informants and their roles in destination Trysil.

3.4 Analytic methods

The content analysis of the empirical material consisted of three main stages [43]; identifying analytic units, developing a coding scheme and assessing credibility. The initial analysis took place in Norwegian. We began by identifying and organizing relevant units of analysis by selecting only those textual passages referring to the certification process. Excluded passages consisted of descriptions of the organizational background and purpose or references to the destination that did not mention the certification process. In the remaining material, sections dealing with

Interview	Acronym informant	Role in Trysil
1	T1E	Owner tourism experience business
2	T2H	Sustainability manager hotel
3	T3E	Owner tourism experience business
4	T4E	Owner tourism experience business
5	T5E	Marketing manager tourism experience business
6	T6D	Representative destination marketing organization
7	T7M	Representative municipality
8	T8	Consultant
9	H1	Representative Hanen
10	IN1	Representative Innovation Norway

Table 1.
Informants and their roles.

learning, knowledge sharing, sustainability and innovation were noted (using English concepts). To develop the coding scheme, we looked for sensitizing concepts from the literature while being open for new concepts emerging from the data. We combined features present in data with extant theory [44] in order to understand specific instances ([45], p. 631). The abductive analysis followed three steps: (1) the application of an established interpretive rule (theory), (2) the observation of a surprising - in light of the interpretive rule - empirical phenomenon and (3) the imaginative articulation of a new interpretive rule (theory) that resolves the surprise ([46], p. 1269). First-order concepts were defined when looking for elements that were physically present in the material due to the interview questions based on constructs from the literature review. The next step was to engage in latent coding by conducting an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data, which resulted in a set of second-order themes [43, 47]. Finally, a set of overarching dimensions were defined to facilitate the presentation of the emerging understanding.

4. Findings

The case study reveals that interorganizational learning for sustainable innovation is resulting from the certification process, but that it gets disrupted by barriers. The following three types of barriers have identified that slow down learning for sustainability in tourism destinations: (1) sustainability ambitions; (2) relevance of the certification process for users and (3) experiences of users.

4.1 Interorganizational learning for sustainability

Tourism actors are integrated in several networks and the sustainable certification process has increased collaborative activities as well as awareness of sustainability indicators among tourism actors. The focus on sustainability has resulted in the development and innovation of new products, extended seasons, sustainable practices, infrastructure, media attention and marketing. Sustainability is now communicated and acted upon.

> *There is much more talking about it, it is highlighted as important thing. And regarding the garbage management, which was completely disaster in the past, the municipality has put pressure, demands have been made that this must be addressed and realized. And with the development of different trash cans and everything like that, it has clearly happened (T5E).*

Besides waste and water management, energy efficiency is an important sustainability driver for innovation. For example, Trysil tries to reduce the energy consumption associated with alpine skiing by preserving natural snow. Trysil is advertising with early skiing conditions and every October, the destination hosts a cross-country skiing tournament. For this event, snow has to be produced which is an energy consuming process. Instead of producing everything, snow from the previous year is saved.

> *You produce snow in winter and then you have natural snow and you save that snow for the following year. It costs a lot less to collect snow in piles, lay a cloth over and use wood-chips to cover it, so that you can save about 70% of the snow from April to November. Last year in April, 29,000 cubic meters were saved. And in October when they took away all the chips, there were 21,000 cubic meters left. So that is a way to think about the economy and environment (T5E).*

Moreover, the structured nature of the certification process on the level of the municipalities and destination marketing organizations results in a more systematic, professional and thorough approach to tourism development, and some of these changes reach tourism firms. However, there is potential for more involvement, and bottom-up processes. Several tourism actors perceive that there has been a lack of information and learning connected to the certification of the destination. Consequently, tourism firms do not see a direct link between the certification process and their own development, claiming that they do not see the potential of how to use the sustainability certification for the benefit of their innovation processes. In the remaining findings, we will discuss three barriers standing in the way of interorganizational learning for sustainable innovation.

4.2 Barrier 1: sustainability ambitions

Despite the positive changes towards sustainability, different ambitions regarding sustainable development hamper understanding and learning potential between actors in the studied destinations. According to the sustainability project manager at one municipality, tourism businesses experience the concept of sustainability as challenging to work with, and they have a narrower understanding of the concept than the municipality or the certification organization. Moreover, there are tensions between different types of tourism organizations within the same destination and what to prioritize when focusing on sustainable development.

The main concern of the municipalities and DMO's is to keep local communities vital and lively, which is threatened by an aging, a migrating population and seasonal tourism activities. Destination management puts social and economic sustainability in the foreground with a focus on whole year-round tourism by balancing the numbers of guests in the winter season and the summer season. For example, in winter, Trysil is fully booked with alpine adventurers while the shoulder seasons and summer

seasons have much less visitors. This makes it hard for tourism companies to create jobs year-round.

> *It is important to have a year-round travel life because then we get jobs all year round and then it is easier to attract new residents. And it's easier for those who stay here to stay. So it has been a focus of Trysil municipality's long-term plans for many, many years. (T7M).*

For the interviewed business actors, sustainability was still a rather vague concept linked to waste management. In our cases, it seems that business concern for sustainability depends on the sector, i.e., those businesses working closely together with nature focused on green and environmental aspects, culture-based firms are concerned with heritage and cultural sustainability, culinary experience-based firms focused on social sustainability.

The sustainability project management sees it as its role to motivate tourism businesses, and to help them to figure out what sustainability can mean for them. Project management promotes a holistic and dynamic view on sustainability where the overall goal is to make the destination a better place to live.

> *"For me, it has to do with society, consciousness, social responsibility. We must run our tourism businesses responsibly. And that means that we must increase our knowledge and we must make the right decisions. Be it at common or municipal level, or at the level of businesses" (T8).*

4.3 Barrier: user experiences

The process of getting a sustainability label at the level of the destination was driven by the municipalities and the DMOs. This local certification team, in line with the policy of the certification organization Innovation Norway, believes that sustainability knowledge and practices will increase if firms in the destination get certified as well, as it will increase learning and integration in networks. However, only few in Trysil, are working on a business-level certification because they do not see the point of getting certified, or lack resources necessary for certification, and are therefore less open to new knowledge and learning. The larger and more professional an organization is, the easier it becomes to get an environmental certification. When a tourism business has this critical level of professionality, the destination certification can be of help to decide how to get certified. For example, one hotel changed its certification scheme from Svanemerket to Environmental Lighthouse because the destination certification promoted the Environmental Lighthouse certification. They worked with a lot of improvements to reduce energy and water consumption.

> *When I started to work here, we installed water saving showers. We reduced water consumption to 8 liters per minute and we did that for both hotels (T2H).*

One of the smaller experience-based firms had started with the Environmental Lighthouse certification process but has given up because they experienced the label as requiring too much work, too bureaucratic and with a narrow environmental focus.

> *It (Environmental lighthouse) is a scheme that is flexible and spans many industries, so that it is a scheme that does not have such a large threshold to enter. And that is probably one of the advantages, that there is a low threshold to get started, and then it is a scheme that gives you some systems and routines in place, and helps you to work with HSE really (GL).*

It seems true that HSE is seen as a relevant part of the environmental certification on the business level, but that there are many other elements that are less relevant.

> *Considering the environmental lighthouse label, there are a lot of things that we are not really doing. HSE seems the biggest part for us in that particular environmental certification (PJ).*

A sustainability certification on the business level can contribute to internalizing the destination certification. The destination label gets more meaning when businesses start working with their own certification because they are able to operationalize the different aspects of sustainability.

> *I feel like something happened when we got people to sit down and start the Environmental Lighthouse process. Then in a way, it will be done from the bottom up really (T5E).*

In regard to learning from the certification process, it is a missed chance for both tourism actors and the management of the destination certification that only few small tourism businesses managed to get a certification. However, our interviews and observations show that small tourism experience businesses do work with and according to sustainability principles, but hardly in a professional or systematic way. The reasons for the small businesses not getting certified seem to be a lack of time and resources and a misfit between the goals of the certification and the activities of the business. Hence, the negative experience of the tourism actors with business-level certifications stands in the way of the learning possibilities that the certification on the destination level has to offer. These user experiences of the certification programs at both the business and destination level can disrupt learning for sustainability.

4.4 Barrier: relevance for users

The certification has given the municipality and DMO a working methodology to improve collaboration between the tourism industry and the municipality. Also, working with the label has given meaning and content to the concept of sustainability. The sustainable destination project has contributed to more knowledge about sustainability and quality in the destinations through communication, competence development and training. Trysil has focused on educating its members in terms of experience quality, guidance and marketing. The goal is to increase the level of competence among tourism actors in the destination.

> *We are working on increasing competence among our members. We organize courses that tourism actors here can participate in to develop their business. For example, we have also been trained in how to write better both in terms of offers and with information on websites to give good enough information to guests. We are going to*

> *run more training, increase the competence in languages by offering an English course (GL).*

However, there is scepticism regarding the usefulness of the certification label in attracting more customers and selling more products. The market does not seem to find it that important that a ski destination is sustainable.

> *"We think in a holistic way in Trysil, and that all companies will earn more". And it is good that we are environmentally conscious. But I do not think Trysil has sold any more tourism products because of it, no. (T4E).*

Nevertheless, the interviewed companies showed a great deal of responsibility towards nature and the environment. And the need to communicate with and educate guests.

> *That is how we communicate and work with our guests. And how we can influence them in thinking sustainably or thinking environmentally when they are here as a guest (T5E).*

It is hard to say if this environmental consciousness is a consequence of the spreading of awareness and knowledge from governmental organizations. The municipality and destination company actors at least think they played a role in it and say that the awareness of the environment and the job that needs to be done is higher than before the certification was in place.

> *We have spread knowledge in relation to things that can be done and we ensure that both small and large measures contribute. Awareness about the environment is probably much higher now than before we started with the labeling scheme (T6D).*

Working with the certification has also contributed to improved communication and learning between municipality actors.

> *Since we have these common plans, we are more able to make visible what we do. Before we took it a little bit for granted. But through that work on the certification, and not least when we report on so many different criteria, it creates an awareness of what we do, and we do quite a lot, we found out (T7M).*

Besides the learning at the destination level, the sustainability team (municipality and destination company) focuses on learning from innovation Norway, other destinations as well as from their own experiences.

> *We have lots of project meetings regularly. We still have them with those who started (the pilot destinations), but also the new ones that have come in. And Innovation Norway is good at making it possible for us to hear what happens to the other destinations, different people and to get tips and inspiration (T6D).*

The certification team and local governance actors say they have learned a lot from the certification. The interviewed firms say they learned little from the destination certification and that they do not immediately see the potential of the sustainability certification for their own practices, marketing and innovation. Instead of concrete

projects, the certification program comes with rules, regulations and requirements. For example, a dog sledding experience business uses a snow scooter to prepare tracks which can also be used by local people and visitors with dog sledges. The owner of the company explains how difficult it was for him to get permission to use the scooters.

> *It is terribly strict with snowmobiles. But, after talking to the municipality and destination of Trysil, I could make the trails. My trail network is now included in the trail maps so that there are opportunities for others with dog teams who come here on holidays (T3E).*

When the rules are too rigid, there is little room for developing a sustainable strategy that fits the uniqueness of the destination. Tourism actors doubt the relevance of the destination certification when they experience a lack of flexibility and rigid rules, which can hamper knowledge integration for sustainable development. Destinations need the flexibility to find a balance between their unique situation and the requirements for sustainable development.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The sustainability destination label has offered Norwegian tourism destinations a context in which learning for sustainable innovation can take place. The findings of this study suggest that this learning is somewhat hampered by disrupting factors in the certification process. We have presented three barriers to learning, suggesting that learning outcomes of the process of becoming more sustainable could be more profound if knowledge sharing and learning experiences would not be disrupted. **Figure 1** shows these barriers on a timeline. Barriers to learning lie in past experiences, present practices of knowledge relevance and ideas about the future that are shaped by ambitions.

User experiences can be seen as action-personal forces that depend on the absorptive capacity and expertise of tourism actors. Knowledge integration depends on structural-organizational aspects like relationships and knowledge connections between actors. The sustainability ambitions of actors are embedded in cultural and societal aspects that characterize their environment. Barriers to learning emerge therefore on different levels and are influenced by different types of forces. One common characteristic of barriers is that they are continuously evolving. This chapter seeks to spark further conceptual and empirical debate around how tourism businesses in destinations learn for sustainability, and how this is anchored in an ongoing process. Innovation for sustainability is a road with many bumps and barriers that require reconsideration, resilience and creativity of the actors who are embarked on the journey. We applied the concept of the learning tourism destination (LTD) as a vehicle to develop an understanding of how tourism businesses learn from a sustainable certification project at the cluster or destination level. The LTD can form a useful framework and methodology for building consensus, dialog and collective learning processes among stakeholders [19]. When stakeholders are aware that they are part of a LTD, they have a better opportunity to express their concerns and provide information for the decision-making process than in destinations that are not focused on learning. In the case context of sustainably certified destinations in Norway, the LTD was not applied as a methodology for enhancing sustainability, which affected the user experiences of the different stakeholders.
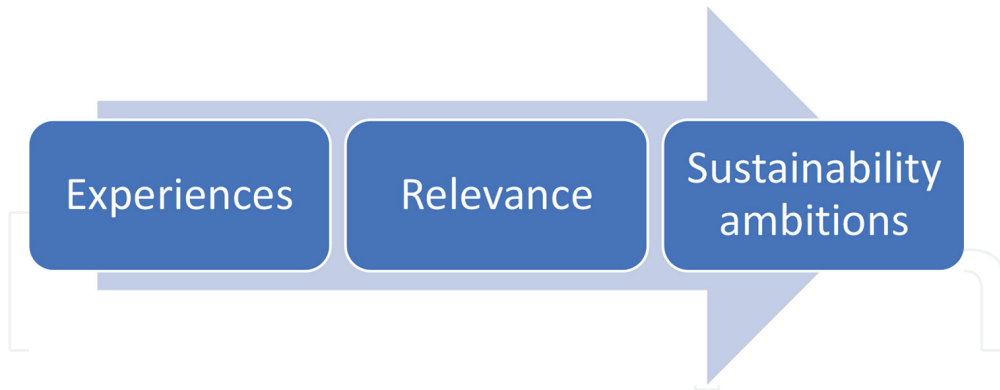
Figure 1.
Learning barriers in the sustainability process.

Knowledge and learning come from people and their relationships with each other and their experiences. Sadd et al. [48] conclude that tourism is a late adopter of knowledge management and the ability and willingness to share knowledge appears less collaborative in nature in tourism destinations. Shared experiences, allowing for the co-creation of knowledge would then overcome the challenge of knowledge integration between different stakeholders. However, the certification project was dominated by managers (Innovation Norway, municipalities and DMOs) without much focus on co-creating knowledge about sustainability within the destinations. The certification scheme and project form the context in which the cluster must find meaning that fits their unique situation instead of adopting a one size fits all approach to sustainability. This requires that stakeholders with different perspectives and knowledge truly come together and collaboratively form a strategy – in other words, to co-create knowledge [48]. The learning regions' literature recognizes that governance should shift away from traditional administrative and regulatory functions towards enabling and facilitating knowledge exchange [9, 18]. However, enabling and facilitating knowledge is not an easy task for governmental organizations that find themselves in the middle of different networks, values and knowledge cultures. We saw that knowledge sticks often to governmental organizations and learning takes mostly place between organizations responsible for the certification.

Sustainability was understood differently between stakeholders, which makes it difficult to develop a shared vision of the concept. A common vision can be developed through certification at the business level, but we see that the certifications that are offered, are ill-fitting the type of tourism activities and tourism businesses at the destination level. Hospitality businesses often have a business-level certification that assists them on their path to sustainability. It fits their activities challenges, and possibilities. While the micro-sized experience-based companies fall out because they are too small, it is too costly for them to start the certification process, or the certification does not fit with their activities that are often a combination of different things.

It is necessary that all voices are gathered around the table and that their complex and often conflicting requirements are considered [48]. The management of the sustainability certification process dominated much of the discussion, and tourism businesses were only brought in to disseminate information in the later stages of the process. In the spirit of the learning destination, the involvement of all actors when for example discussing prioritization of sustainability issues and values will be

positive. We support the conclusion of Cooper on the benefits of knowledge management for tourism innovation (2018) and in order to transform into a sustainable destination where values mean more than what is written on the wall (value statements in certification programs) stakeholders need to develop a trusting, learning and sharing culture through the collective intelligence and knowledge of the people and organizations who make up the destination.

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